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State/oir

NIE's on "the literally  
unknowable"

15 March 1955

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: The Role of the Office of Intelligence Research,  
Department of State

Notes: After receiving your permission to talk over with Colonel Miller of the Clark Committee the intelligence problem in the Department of State, I spent about an hour with him on Monday morning, 7 February. I made no reference to CIA or to any of its officers, except to note that my views might be at some variance with your own. The following, based on my notes, represents the substance of my remarks:

1. When the RIA Branch of OSS was placed in the Department of State, James Dunn, then Assistant Secretary of State, remarked: "But we are all intelligence officers here." In a sense, Mr. Dunn was right. State policy officers are well-equipped to make educated guesses as to future developments in their areas of specialization. It is my view, however, that this does not refute the arguments for a specialized intelligence organization within the Department.

2. I first considered the question of estimates. Fundamentally, an intelligence estimate does not concern itself with guessing what is knowable but unknown (e.g., Viet Minh O/S); rather it deals with the literally unknowable (Viet Minh future policy). When the estimator is confronted with the critical decision as to whether his estimate is "probably" or "probably not", he should be free from all subjective tags and pressures that may distort his judgment. The task of preparing an objective estimate should be deputed to someone who has no policy interest at stake. If policy officers (in State or anywhere else) have responsibility for preparing estimates, the result might be apologetics rather than guides for policy. The best system for producing intelligence estimates would put the policymaker in the role of consumer rather than producer.

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3. I am sure that the Secretary has occasionally not been sold on all the estimates of his intelligence staff, but this is not necessarily a reflection on the usefulness of such a staff. We should not expect a commander invariably to believe the findings of his G-2. It is appropriate for him to get his information from any source and to make up his own mind, for the final decision is his alone. But this does not detract from the desirability of having a competent intelligence organization - separated from the concerns of policy - rendering its best guess as to the probable nature of critical unknowables.

4. Apart from the matter of estimates, OIR has a very important role in the production of all sorts of studies and analyses in the non-military area. Its written contributions, for example, are most important in the preparation of 75% of our NIE's. On the basis of the present organization of the intelligence community, this work cannot be matched in quality and quantity from other intelligence resources. If OIR were suddenly liquidated, most of the estimates now programmed for the first and second quarters would have to be postponed until a comparable organization was established elsewhere in the government. (It should be noted in this connection that OIR's experience, staff, and files could not be easily duplicated.)

5. OIR's participation in meetings with the IAC representatives would also be difficult to replace. Surely a policy officer of the Department of State should not be required to represent the Department's intelligence position. Whatever position he held at variance with that of the services or CIA would all too readily - though perhaps unjustly - be identified as apologetics for a policy.

6. A word about basic intelligence. Few would argue the importance of basic political, social, and economic intelligence. It has been argued, however, that the Department should not produce such intelligence. I would take the opposite view. Intelligence should not be produced as a random exercise, but rather should be produced to fit the general needs of policy. The State Department, has primary responsibility in foreign policy (both political and economic aspects), and thus it would seem that political and economic intelligence would be best produced in the Department. Obviously, policy officers do not have the time and probably the inclination to engage in this work.

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(except that produced in CIA as a service of Common Concern - I refer to OIR's work on the Bloc economy & OIR's all-source current intelligence evaluations)

7. Finally, there is the matter of current intelligence. If OIR produced much current intelligence it would be largely lost motion. In this field policy officers are least dependent upon intelligence officers. I believe, however, that OIR does very little current intelligence.

8. From what precedes, therefore, I believe that the Department's intelligence organization should be separated from the policy offices. To be sure, this separation is likely to blunt the guidance which intelligence officers receive from policy officers, but it is my conviction that this is more than compensated for by the likelihood that policy will not influence intelligence.

9. Finally, I feel OIR has already lost more people than it (and the intelligence community) can afford and that the important tasks which I note above are likely to go undone. I certainly do not recommend that OIR be rebuilt to the wartime size of its parent organization, but I do feel that it will fail in its unreplicable services to the intelligence community at large if it is not permitted some modest expansion.

SHERMAN KENT  
Assistant Director  
National Estimates